

## **Speech by Mallam J. Maynard upon Receipt of the Vern Countryman Award**

When Will called me to inform me of this, I just knew a terrible mistake had been made. When I thought of the past recipients of the Countryman Award, it seemed to me that my acceptance of this was some sort of fraud. I really thought hard about calling Will and refusing the award.

And then I thought about how much love I feel from, and toward, so many people who are in this room, and I thought about this feeling of fraud, and said to myself, “Heck, nobody would really care if I might not have actually gone to law school or passed a bar exam.”

But regardless of knowing that I should not be compared to past Countryman recipients, I am at peace, knowing that I am a public interest lawyer who has had the incredible privilege of helping people by doing this work. And this is an opportunity for me to thank you all from the bottom of my heart for allowing me to be a part of this incredible family.

This family of advocates is here because of the untold love and dedication of a whole lot of lawyers over many decades. Dr. King said that “social justice is love in action.” I believe that he would say that practicing public interest law is, to a large extent, the practice of love. We endure so much propaganda against trial lawyers. I believe that Dr. King would declare that you, as public interest trial lawyers, are practitioners of love.

It is: love for families who are working harder than ever and getting less and less for their work;  
love for people who don’t have access to medical care or education or credit on fair terms;  
love for people who spend their lives deprived of essential time to spend with their families because they are working two or three jobs and paying obscene rates of interest;  
love for people who don’t have access to justice because of poverty or because they are forced into absolutely corrupt private systems of justice.

The unvarnished truth is that we live in an age where our government is often used as a tool for those who are intent upon concentrating wealth in the hands of fewer and fewer individuals. Resources that should be used for health care and rebuilding our schools and our infrastructure and for providing safe, decent housing and communities are used for the most inhuman, obscene, and irrational purposes.

How do we, as lawyers, respond to this? How do we, as warriors for our clients, fight in the battle against fear and greed? We remember the lessons of Dr. King and Ghandi and we remember that we respond most effectively, most directly, and in the most revolutionary fashion by engaging the power of love. That does not mean shying

away from battle or from conflict--it means fighting with a level of passion and abandon that does not come from motivation for personal gain. It is the realization that, at some point, love dissolves the distinction between giving and taking and we are, in fact, truly one with those we serve.

Every time we sue a predatory lender, every time we save a home, every time we defend someone from an unfair debt collector, we start a small, but powerful, revolution. People nourished with fairness and justice turn away from the politics of fear and greed and they look for politics that offer fairness and justice for all people.

The market fundamentalists – the lenders who claim that any regulation is bad regulation--preach without shame that unbridled greed is good. That is their mantra: that greed is good. You hear it unabashedly on the non-stop, get-rich-quick television networks. It is taught in our university business schools. It is pounded into every young mortgage broker, debt collector, and payday lender. And we are now seeing the harvest of this incredibly destructive and deluded self-indulgence.

Well, we are here to say that unbridled greed is not good. It is not good for the victims of predatory lending, it is not good for the economy and it is not good for the spirit of this nation.

Among the best remedies for this economy would be to deregulate the trial lawyers and allow us to hold the corporate crooks accountable to their victims. The economy works best by requiring transparency, honesty and fair dealing. Often litigation is the only way to bring the disinfecting light of day to the dark corners of the marketplace.

The practice of public interest law sends love into the future. It has positive consequences which are far beyond what we ever personally witness. Besides that—it is fun. It is alchemy. It is magic. Where else can you transform the lead of foreclosure and turn it into the gold of a safe, decent home for a family on fair terms? Where else can you work with people who have been exploited and abused and get the thrill of lifting them to a place where they have a fresh start and a chance to thrive and succeed on fair terms? This work empowers people and it enriches them both materially and spiritually. It truly builds their ability to spread love in their families and in their communities. I am so proud to say that I love my country and I know that I serve it to the best of my ability by being a public interest trial lawyer.

There are so many people here that I would like to thank and I don't want to take up your valuable time with a personal saga but I do have to thank Carlene McNulty, who is always my sister and often my co-counsel and moral compass; Jerry Hartzell, whose enormous energy, talent and magnanimous spirit makes the world a lot more fun to live in; Margot Saunders, whose passion for justice has inspired me throughout my entire career; Mike Calhoun, whose generosity and genius is just without limits--the organizations which he helped found--and guides as counsel--have shown the world that loans can be made to people of limited income and that these people will perform if those

loans are made on fair terms--over 5 billion dollars in credit to over 55,000 families; Al Ripley, for his heroic fortitude while having to associate with those lender lobbyists at the NC legislature; Kathleen Keest and Elizabeth Renuart and all of the folks at NCLC, whose work I have used for my clients thousands of times; Paul Bland for his work in the NC payday cases (and with a sincere prayer of thanks that he is on our side.) To my friends here from Wilmington, North Carolina: Lee Crouch and Dean Davis, whose pro bono service and service to Legal Aid have been such an enormously positive influence on access to justice in our community. To the inspiring and brilliant young lawyers such as Daniel Moesteller and Sara Bolling, who are here for the first time. Welcome to this family – we are so grateful that you are joining us. And especially to my law partner, Maria McIntyre. Maria inspires me every day with her devotion to our clients and to our cause. She teaches me by her example how to be a better, more caring lawyer and a better person.

That bumper sticker from the 60's "make love not war" began to seem pretty "cliché-ic" and trite through the years. It might have some renewed meaning for us today. The love we make in the world through this work may not be exactly what we were thinking about in the 60's. But the love we make through our work is the best antidote and prevention against the greed, fear and injustice that leads to suffering, violence and war. So in that spirit, I say: Let us renew our commitment as warriors and go out into the world and make love!

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